

Column by Congresswoman Debbie Halvorson (IL-11)

The Illinois Department of Employment Security recently published unemployment numbers for Illinois metropolitan areas including the 11th district - and as expected, we saw another increase. While some parts of our district - such as the Bloomington-Normal area have experienced only small increases in unemployment rates, many of our other communities are among the highest.

For instance, the report shows the Kankakee-Bradley area with a 3.3% increase in the jobless rate, bringing unemployment to 12%. It also classified the Joliet and Naperville areas as part of metropolitan Chicago jobless numbers, which are up 9% from 5.6% in Feb. 2008. The increase in jobless numbers are also being felt at state and national levels, which is why we are working hard at the federal level to address these and other unemployment issues.

The good news is that stimulus dollars and grant funding are helping to create job opportunities in Illinois. In fact, the district could see an estimated 8600 new jobs in the near future. And while I admit we don't have all the answers yet, I'm committed to working with others to continue seeking solutions that best serve the interests and needs of the 11th District. Our children and grandchildren are depending on it!

While I'm hopeful that unemployment numbers will shrink, I'm equally as troubled by a new report out this week that shows an 11.9% increase in unemployed veterans during the month of February. Our Afghanistan and Iraq veterans are getting hit hard, especially those between the ages of 20- and- 24. This group reached a 15% jobless rate in February as well. What bothers me is that these are the men and women who put their lives on the line for us, making these veteran unemployment numbers unacceptable on many levels.

Although current statistics show a tough job market after military service, there is determination at the federal level to do more for our veterans regarding these and other issues. One benefit that invites jobs for veterans is available through the recently passed stimulus package. It includes a \$2400 per-person credit for employers who hire unemployed veterans in 2009 and 2010. In addition, Labor Department career centers are now provide priority services for veterans, the HireVetsFirst ([www.hirevetsfirst.gov/website](http://www.hirevetsfirst.gov/website)) is offering assistance and more veterans are receiving preference in some government positions.

As we continue to work on resolving the very difficult economic issues facing us as a district and as a nation, it is clear that it may take awhile before unemployment numbers make a strong turn upward. Last year, the House helped to make that turn when it established the Wounded Warriors Project ([www.woundedwarriorproject.org](http://www.woundedwarriorproject.org)) - a program that offers employment opportunities to the wounded and disabled veterans. Recently the House took another step in the right direction by passing the GIVE ACT, a piece of legislation that received my strong support. This Act includes the creation of the Veterans Engaged for Tomorrow (VET) Corps ([www.politics4all.com/bills/111HR1401](http://www.politics4all.com/bills/111HR1401)) - a group that promotes service opportunities to veterans and retired military.

While jobless numbers have increased for vets and non-vets alike, it is important to know that I'm committed to working hard for job creation and decreasing unemployment in the 11th district. As your Congresswoman - and as a military mom, I'm also dedicated to finding a fair and equitable agenda for veterans when it comes to workforce education. As the only Illinois representative serving on the House Veteran Affairs Committee and with the creation of the 11th District Veterans Advisory Committee, I look forward to working on these and other issues affecting unemployment and job growth - and I sincerely hope you'll work with me as well.

Please feel free to go to my website for more information on issues affecting the 11th district at <http://halvorson.house.gov/>.